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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000310

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION BEGIS PREPARATIONS FOR CHERNOBYL PATH
DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: A. MINSK 262

[B](#). 06 MINSK 459

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 d).

Summary

[1](#). (SBU) The oppositio has begun preparations for the annual ChernobylPath demonstration on April 26. The organizing ommittee already approved a resolution on the objective of the march, submitted an application to the city authorities for permission to hold the demonstration in downtown Minsk, and created subcommittees to advertise the event. All coalition parties and organizations appear to be working together on the preparations. However, despite all the careful planning, organizing committee members expect the GOB to use preemptive detainments and other tactics to sour the opposition's Chernobyl Path plans. End summary.

Organizing Committee Formed, Approves Resolution

[2](#). (U) Two days following the March 25 "Day of Freedom" opposition demonstration (ref A), the coalition formed an organizing committee for the annual April 26 Chernobyl Path (ref B). Chaired by Belarusian National Academy of Sciences (BNAS) member and former Chernobyl liquidator Ivan Nikitchenko, the organizing committee at its first meeting on April 3 adopted a resolution calling upon Belarusians to join the march to demand the GOB:

-- Eliminate presidential decrees that contradict existing legislation protecting Chernobyl victims, particularly decrees that suspend subsidies to victims;

--Reinstate subsidies to Chernobyl victims and give greater financial support;

--Eliminate GOB bureaucratic obstacles that block international humanitarian aid and funds;

--Repair and reopen all medical centers and the radiological institute;

--Stop harassing those who are vocal and critical of the GOB;

--Approach the UN with a request on looking into Belarusians' human rights.

[3](#). (C) In an April 4 meeting, Nikitchenko told Poloff that a growing number of Belarusians, particularly those living in radioactively contaminated regions, were becoming frustrated

with the GOB after losing most of their benefits as Chernobyl victims, primarily cheap/free medicine, easy access to medical care, subsidized housing, and adequate pensions. Nikitchenko predicted that because of this growing frustration, more people would participate in the march than that of last year.

Committee Applies for Permission

¶4. (U) On April 4, member of the organizing committee and BNF deputy head Ales Yanukevich delivered to the Minsk City Executive Committee an application seeking permission to hold the Chernobyl Path in downtown Minsk, beginning at Yakub Kolas Square at 18:00 on April 26, followed by a march on the sidewalks along Independence Avenue to the new national library. According to Belarusian legislation, the Minsk authorities must inform the organizing committee of their decision by April 20.

¶5. (C) Yanukevich on April 6 told Poloff he expected the Minsk authorities to approve the march because the opposition was not asking for October Square as the venue -- which is too close to administrative buildings for the authorities' comfort -- and because authorities were traditionally less severe on the Chernobyl Path. If the authorities refused permission and used riot police to force participants to move towards Bangalore Square, Yanukevich predicted the march would relocate at the BNAS where the March 25 demonstration and previous Chernobyl Path were held.

Chernobyl Path - A Unified Effort

¶6. (C) Yanukevich reiterated to Poloff that all coalition

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parties and organizations were involved in the Chernobyl Path preparations, including de facto opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich. The BNF, United Civic Party, Milinkevich, and entrepreneurs were providing material and financial support to the organizing committee. The Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) pledged support, but to date had not made a contribution. According to Yanukevich, Milinkevich at first was very active in the organizing committee, but suddenly distanced himself, claiming that he could not fully support the march if it was not beginning on October Square. However, he "promised" his people would work with the committee and not create a separate preparation group.

¶7. (C) The committee is planning to hold a conference on April 19-20 to discuss the consequences of Chernobyl, the current status of victims, the harmful health effects of radioactive contaminated food consumption, and the cons of building a nuclear power plant in Belarus. Nikitchenko told Poloff that specialists in radiation, physicists, researchers, and journalists would be invited to participate.

Comment

¶8. (C) Both Nikitchenko and Yanukevich expect authorities on April 26 to use tactics similar to those used to obstruct the March 25 demonstration, primarily the preemptive detainment of organizing committee members, political party and youth leaders, and activists printing and distributing advertising material in the days leading up to the demonstration. Regional activists in Gomel and Mogilyov also submitted applications to city authorities for permission to hold Chernobyl demonstrations, but like their March 25 attempts, we expect their requests to be turned down. Also, similar to the March 25 demonstration, the pro-government Belarusian Republican Youth Union, in an obvious attempt to distract citizens from the opposition demonstration, is planning its own Chernobyl Path on April 25, which will include a free

concert of Belarusian pop stars.
Moore